Johnson Pham

9/9/10

AP US History

Howard Zinn on History

From *A People’s History of the United States* by Howard Zinn:

A. “I prefer to tell the story of the discovery of America from the viewpoint of the Arawaks, of the Constitution from the standpoint of the slaves, of Andrew Jackson as seen by the Cherokees, of the rise of industrialism as seen by the young women in the Lowell textile mills…This book will be skeptical of governments and their attempts…to ensnare ordinary people in a giant web of nationhood pretending to a common interest.

The pretense is that there really is such a thing as “the United States,” subject to occasional conflicts and quarrels, but fundamentally a community of people with common interests. It is as if there really is a “national interest” represented in the Constitution, in territorial expansion, in the laws passed by Congress, the decisions of the courts, the development of capitalism, the culture of education and the mass media.”

 1. What are Howard Zinn’s main points in the passages above?

His main points are that the history of America is a cruel one, that people were mistreated during the beginning and were still mistreated as time passed (examples: the people he talked about; slaves; native tribes), from the pov from the ones who didn’t benefit from the whole “thing”. He sort of challenges the name “the United States” because of the conflicts and quarrels. He also says that they are united with their interests shown in all of the things they have done.

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B. “I do remember a statement I once read: “The cry of the poor is not always just, but if you don’t listen to it, you will never know what justice is.””

 2. Why did Zinn include this quote in his book?

Zinn included this quote in his book because as shown in the first quote, people are (heavily-severely) mistreated and he wants to show this quote to help prove his point. The quote basically is that if the poor/mistreated/weak speak for themselves, they may sound a little unreasonable but if you don’t listen to them, you won’t see how bad they have it.

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 3. Your thoughts on Zinn, history, and justice?

My thoughts are that Zinn is a reasonable person, he is right, this did happen and it wasn’t right at all, but America developing was like a child growing up, these were still mistakes that they made. In his book/quote, he shows/talks about the mistakes that America, I agree with him, the history of America isn’t the best but it was what it was. His definition of justice from the second quote...it is nearly perfect, I have a few objections to say, (but it really is good so I will forget it) though I wonder if he made it up or did someone really made that quote... (This is a quote he should take a look at: “To err is human, to forgive, divine”-Alexander Pope).